



Traveling exhibit opens



(Visitors tour the traveling Smithsonian exhibit in Chatsworth Saturday morning)

Fairbury and Chatsworth are among towns like Welch, West Virginia and Helper City, Utah to be featured in a traveling Smithsonian Institution exhibit which officially opened Saturday.

The Central Illinois Connection Center in downtown Chatsworth is hosting the display known as, "Spark! Places of Innovation" through Oct. 14.

"Chatsworth is recognized for this building and Fairbury is recognized for the wonderful work happening with farm-to-table agriculture," explained Matt Meecham with Illinois Humanities.

Local historian Dale Maley noticed an e-mail around 18 months ago about the traveling exhibit and felt a unique aspect of Fairbury was the food served to Chicago restaurants through local farms. He filled out and submitted an application and someone else submitted one for the Connection Center in Chatsworth.

"I got notified Fairbury won and also that Chatsworth won," recalled Maley.

Since it did not make sense to set up a display such as this in two different towns only miles apart, they thought the Chatsworth building was a great place to host it.

Fairbury's display explains how over 45 small farms in the area provide farm-raised products to Chicago-area restaurants weekly and how some of the working farms offer tours, such as Slagel Family Farm and Spence Farm. A display about Chatsworth indicates how a historic downtown building was restored as a unique facility which connects communities, youth and others across the area.

Visitors to the traveling exhibit can also learn a bit of local history between Fairbury and Chatsworth. Fairbury Echoes Museum has a sign paying tribute to local innovator Dr. Francis E. Townsend, known as the father of social security. He was born on a farm northwest of Fairbury in 1867 and lived there until he was 18. Townsend later attended medical school and started a movement late in life to create an old age pension based on a national sales tax.

The Chatsworth train wreck of 1887 also has a small display with small postcards explaining the incident in which 85 lives were lost and an additional 372 were injured.

"Passenger cars started going down on top of each other," explained Maley. "All of the towns pitched in from the area and they all sent every doctor they had."

A companion exhibit on the train wreck is located at the Chatsworth Area Library, 501 East School Street.

Located in Washington, D.C., The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education and research complex with 21 museums along with the National Zoo. It was founded in 1846.

The Smithsonian traveling exhibit in Chatsworth is currently open Tuesday through Friday from 1 to 7 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Field trips are encouraged Monday through Friday and anyone interested can contact Mary Catherine Carter for scheduling at 815-848-6246.



(Dale Maley speaks at an opening ceremony for the exhibit Saturday)



(A sign introducing the traveling exhibit in Chatsworth)